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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC 0086  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000896

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [AM](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER ENCOURAGING ON RADIO LIBERTY; NOT  
SO ON NEW IRAQ MISSION

Classified By: CDA R.V. Perina, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) CDA paid an introductory courtesy call on Prime Minister Serzh Sargsian July 12, accompanied by DCM and pol/econ chief. Sargsian joked that he had expected to get a permanent U.S. Ambassador, but failing that, he was very pleased to see CDA in Yerevan again. CDA affirmed that Washington was working hard to resolve the lack of a permanent U.S. ambassador in Yerevan. In reviewing the bilateral relationship, CDA also praised Sargsian's role as chairman of the MCC Governing Council and expressed appreciation for Armenia's troop contributions in Iraq and Kosovo.

12. (C) CDA then raised our concerns about the apparent intent to cease broadcasts of Radio Liberty on Armenian public radio. He commented that this action would not be understood in Washington, and Armenia's reputation would surely suffer from the perception that it had driven an independent media voice off the air in the lead-up to presidential elections. He said that the IBB was preparing to send a senior official to Yerevan to negotiate the contract and payment problems, and we hoped this could all be resolved as a technical, contractual issue and not become a political one. The prime minister agreed to consider this a technical issue and assured us there was no intent to shut down Radio Liberty, reminding of his earlier assurance to then-CDA Godfrey. He said he had instructed the chairman of the state radio and television commission to negotiate with IBB to sort through the difficulties. The PM said he expected the problems to be fully resolved at that level, but reiterated his willingness to speak again with CDA on the matter in a few weeks, if there was any difficulty settling the dispute. He repeated his confidence that this probably would not be necessary, as the dispute would surely be settled promptly. CDA likewise expressed confidence that the matter could be resolved as a technical issue and warned again against any precipitous action to shut down RL broadcasting.

13. (C) CDA also noted that the U.S. Defense Department had, during Armenia's Bilateral Defense Consultations in Washington June 27-28, requested the Armenian Defense Ministry consider increasing its contribution to the Iraq peacekeeping mission by taking over from Georgian troops responsibility for "middle ring" UN security in Baghdad. CDA inquired about Armenia's thinking on this request.

14. (C) Sargsian replied that "unlike Georgia," Armenia faced the ever-present risk of combat (meaning with neighboring Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh), and thus could not afford to send so many combat troops to Iraq. Further, development of Armenia's peacekeeping battalion was not yet sufficiently advanced that Armenia had enough qualified troops to take on such a mission. Sargsian said he would not put inexperienced

troops into such a situation, for which they were unprepared.

Sargsian also took the opportunity to grouse briefly about Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program pipeline spending difficulties dating back to 2005, which he implied had slowed development of Armenia's PKO troops. Sargsian expressed warm appreciation, however, to the U.S. Defense Department for sponsoring his visit to Iraq earlier this year, which had greatly informed his understanding of the situation there. He made it clear that he understood how unwise it would be to send unprepared troops into Iraq.

15. (C) COMMENT: The press release issued by the PM's office after the meeting indicated that he is willing to pursue negotiation of the Radio Liberty issue. But we are not sure that Sargsian was personally aware of the latest stage of the Radio Liberty dispute or that Armenian Public Radio had sent RFE/RL a cut-off notice. That said, we are happy to pocket his personal commitment that it would be resolved, and we urge IBB's negotiator to come to Yerevan as quickly as possible to "cash the check" on the PM's commitment. We will also raise the point with the President and Foreign Minister early next week, after their return to Armenia.

16. (C) COMMENT (CONTINUED): Sargsian's expressed frustration regarding slow obligation of FMF monies is dated. We will seek an early opportunity to update the PM with the recent successes of this program; we are disappointed that our senior contacts at the MOD have not addressed this.  
PERINA